

Soc. 4.01.2 - TWENTY
LETTERS TO A
FRIEND

P. CREED, DICK

Sledgehammer Rapt in Satire



SMETANA AND THE BEETLES.
By Albert E. Kahn. Illustrations by
David Levine. Random House. 19
pages. \$2.95.

By Dick Creed

WONDER what ever happened to
ol' Svetlana Alliluyeva?

You know, the All-American-type
Russian girl who left her homeland
after her Poppachka died, came to
these golden shores and, as one na-
tional magazine put it, found God and
got rich.

Ol' Svetlana must not be saying or
doing anything heartwarming lately,
because the magazines, the TV and

*Dick Creed is city editor of the
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the newspapers don't say much about
her anymore.

Lest we forget, Albert E. Kahn
and David Levine have produced
"Smetana and the Beetles," which
they call "a fairy tale for adults."
It is a satire as thinly veiled as a
sledgehammer wrapped in tissue pa-
per.

Kahn's diabolical tale and Levine's
outrageous drawings conspire in a de-
lightful, devastating spoof of everyone
involved in the Svetlana caper—Joe

Stalin and his successors, LBJ, the
CIA, the U. S. A., the American press
and ol' Svetlana herself.

The book is written in blank verse,
or something like that, and can be
read in less than an hour.

It is the story of a simple, sincere
Russian princess who lives with her
wicked father in a castle called Grem-
lin, surrounded by a moat "full of
Krokadiles and Vodka."

You remember that touching pic-
ture of a beaming Poppa Joe carry-
ing little ol' Svetlana? Levine's ren-
dering of this happy scene has Smet-
ana, outweighing Poppa Joe two-to-
one, grinning like a combination
Mona Lisa-Cheshire Cat as she pecks
at a typewriter on Poppa's shoulders.

The tale unfolds with Poppa Joe
dying and happy days coming to the
realm of Marxdom. "But what was
sweet for Ivan was sour for Smetana.
People lambasted Poppachka."

Smetana tries the writing game
with a piece called "Life With Father
in the Gremlin," but somehow it
doesn't catch on in the fatherland. So
Smetana begins her quest for Peace,
Privacy and her Real Self.

The rest is history, as the World
Series announcers say, but the history

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books will never record it the way Kahn and Levine do:

—A psychiatrist tells Smetana that the Beatles will help her find her True Ego. "Instead of Nyet! Nyet! Nyet!, they prescribe Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!"

—She finds the embassy of Free-land, Inc., and learns that in Free-land there is no Gremlin, "only a Fairy Grandfather in a White Ranch House who loved Beagles, Bugles and Bagels, Babies, Barbecues and Brotherhood. Everyone there was Happy or Hippy or Both. Flower Children danced in the streets, and there were fireworks even in the ghettos."

—Smetana gets rich and says all she wants is a camping car and a gypsy dog. The rest can go to homeless elves and aged dwarfs.

—Smetana brings tears to the eyes of tough reporters when she says she has seen the light. She says the lights had never worked in Gremlin, "so she had never noticed that people disappeared. Now, after 15 years, the truth had dawned on her."

—And then there was Smetana's book. It was certain to get good notices. "A terribly important book," famous publishers told the press. "It's history, high-class literature and inside stuff. We're sure you'll all agree, since you're publishing it too."

We can't be absolutely sure that Kahn and Levine had ol' Svetlana in mind when they created "Smetana." They have included a short disclaimer which says, in way, that they didn't.

No matter who they had in mind, they have produced a nice little fairy-tale to add warmth to the American hearthside. Just in time for Christmas too.

Ol' Svetlana will like that.

